

SESSION 2003 REVIEW

7TH LEGISLATIVE DISTRICT

Rep. Cathy McMorris

Rep. Bob Sump

Dear Friends,

The 2003 legislative session was a resounding victory for the taxpayers of Washington, families who need jobs, and the employers who provide those jobs. The extra 31 days of special session were long and frustrating, but well worth the effort.

We had established clear goals for the 2003 session: creating jobs and restoring the public's trust in government. There were successes in the first 105-day session, such as relief for rural landowners from costly road maintenance requirements (RMAPS). But we knew we had more work to do to accomplish our primary objectives.

Washington has the second highest unemployment rate in the nation at 7.6 percent. And here in the 7th district, we have some of the highest unemployment rates in the state, with Pend Oreille County's unemployment at 8 percent, Stevens County's at 8.9 percent, Ferry County's at 15.5 percent, Okanogan at 8.6 percent, Lincoln County's at 4.9 percent, and Spokane County's at 6.7 percent. We must focus our attention on protecting existing jobs and creating new jobs for our families.

Critical to the trust issue was our ability to have government share in the challenges of these difficult economic times by balancing the budget without raising taxes. We know families have had to make hard decisions and it was time for government to do the same.

In the end, we adopted a bipartisan operating budget that requires no new general fund taxes. That's \$360 million Washington taxpayers won't have to pay.

As always, we welcome your questions and concerns regarding legislative issues. Our job is to serve you, as well as represent you, so please contact us if we can assist you.

Sincerely,



Cathy McMorris



Bob Sump



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NO-NEW-TAX-BUDGET: They said it couldn't be done

With our state facing the worst economic recession in a generation, House and Senate Republicans felt it was imperative that the Legislature not place a greater burden on taxpayers in our state. The state budget deficit was approaching \$3 billion, yet we insisted that government establish priorities and make the tough choices to achieve those priorities while living within our means, just as families must do.

House Democrats proposed a \$360 million tax increases to fund pay raises for government employees, while making deep cuts in services for the elderly, the developmentally disabled and other vulnerable citizens. It would have been irresponsible to raise taxes on families in our state, many of whom have lost their jobs, in order to provide pay raises to state workers.



Rep. Sump fought on behalf of rural landowners to ease expensive road maintenance requirements.

In the end, a bipartisan coalition of lawmakers prevailed and adopted a no-new-tax budget that focuses limited resources on our most pressing priorities and protects services for the truly needy. The budget avoids drastic cuts in services for developmentally disabled and troubled youth. It protects health care services for children living at up to 250 percent of the federal poverty level, it streamlines the state-funded Basic Health Plan so that we continue to provide health care coverage for 100,000 low-income citizens, and increases funding for the K-12 class-size initiative from \$212 to \$254 per student, reflecting our continued commitment to education.

We'd like to hear from you!

If you have questions or ideas about issues being addressed by the Legislature, we'd like to hear from you. Please provide the information below. You may also contact us directly via e-mail at:

mcmorris_ca@leg.wa.gov or sump_ro@leg.wa.gov

Name _____

Address _____

_____ and/or

E-Mail _____

Comments: _____

Solutions for a better economy by creating jobs for families

While we believe government is on the right fiscal path, our economy clearly is not. No one better understands the gravity of our situation than those of us in northeastern Washington. Workers at Northwest Alloys, Battle Mountain Gold, Echo Bay and the Vaagen Brothers mill have all faced news of layoffs. Other Washington communities faced similar challenges, and the prospect of losing Boeing, Washington's largest private employer, as an anchor tenant of our state's business community has captured the attention of lawmakers throughout the state.

It's become clear that Washington is no longer a competitive place to do business and lawmakers had to act. We worked with a coalition of businesses, labor groups and government to adopt reforms that would help restore our economy and bring jobs to our state.

Landowner RMAP requirements eased

Alleviating the enormous burden of road maintenance requirements on rural landowners was one of our primary objectives of this session. The cost and difficulty of complying with the road maintenance provision of the state's forest and fish plan had placed an unreasonable expense on timberland owners. There are 20,000 forest landowners in the 7th District, many of whom depend on the land base for their livelihood.

The Legislature adopted House Bill 1095, prime-sponsored by Rep. Sump, which would exclude driveways and areas that are not timberland from the definition of "forest road." The bill also exempts primary residential parcels up to 2.5 acres and all lands used primarily for agricultural purposes regardless of size. Requirements are streamlined for small forest landowners who harvest less than 2 million board feet of timber per year. No small forest landowner would be required to comply with the RMAP provisions until they plan to harvest their timber.

Historic tax reforms

One of the main obstacles to bringing jobs to Washington is our state's enormously expensive unemployment insurance and workers' compensation systems. It's not hard to understand why.

Boeing pays a payroll tax of \$772 per employee in Washington. By comparison, the company pays \$378 per worker in California and \$482 per employee in Oregon. In Kansas, which is a leading contender for its new 7E7 project, Boeing pays only \$105 per worker.

Similarly, worker's compensation rates increased (on average) 29 percent in 2003. Without reforms in the current system, job providers faced similar if not higher increases in 2004. These are some of the many areas in which our state is not competitive, not just for Boeing but all employers.

We brought our state's business community, workers and lawmakers together to adopt reforms to protect workers and control costs for employers who have been paying into a program that costs three times the national average.

Striving for flexibility in water policy

Our water resources, already stretched between the needs of fish, agriculture, economic development, and hydropower generation, have been put at further risk by government's snarled water management approach. We have worked to ensure that the integrity of the state's western water law is maintained, that existing water rights of Washingtonians are upheld, and that proper planning is put into place to ensure continued water resources are available.

This session we adopted several reforms that were signed into law to protect water-right holders from having their water rights taken away be-

cause of water-quality issues. Senate Bill 5028 prohibits the Department of Ecology from using its pollution-control authority to limit the full exercise of a water right. This prevents the DOE from infringing on the rights of water users as a means of maintaining instream water temperature.

The Legislature also improved flexibility for communities that have run into needless obstacles when trying to expand water use in order to accommodate economic development and residential needs of growing populations. And to protect our supply of clean, usable water for the future, we passed legislation to implement a statewide planning process for watersheds.

Local communities denied control over planning decisions

Among the lessons of this recent economic downturn is that communities cannot take economic growth for granted. Rural communities have been at odds with state government for years over the one-size-fits-all planning process dictated by the Growth Management Act (GMA), which often strangles economic development efforts for communities desperately in need of jobs.

We supported several measures this session to give control over planning decisions back to communities. Legislation was introduced to limit the authority of the state growth hearings boards that have repeatedly struck down locally developed comprehensive plans. We also sought to allow rural counties to opt out of the GMA.

We were encouraged by a provision of House Bill 5659, which would have let Ferry County remove itself from the GMA requirements. This would have provided an important first step to recognizing the needs of rural communities. Unfortunately, Gov. Gary Locke vetoed the opt-out provision, keeping Ferry County and others under the heavy hand of state planners.

Lifting of trapping ban snared by governor's veto

We were disappointed by the governor's decision to veto the bill that would have lifted the ban on trapping nuisance animals. The Legislature approved Senate Bill 5179, which would have created a permit system for trapping problem animals that cause damage to public and private property.

The bill balanced the desire for humane treatment with the need to employ trapping as a professional wildlife management tool. The governor's own director of the Department of Fish and Wildlife and the chair of the Fish and Wildlife Commission wrote a letter urging him to sign the bill. Instead, the governor bowed to special interests and vetoed the measure.

This veto will result in continued property damage and potential public safety risks in rural areas plagued by mismanagement of wildlife populations.

Rural health care still on life support

Health care providers are still facing an uphill battle in maintaining services in rural communities. Hospitals and nursing homes in Tonasket, Davenport, Odessa, Republic, Newport and Omak and other areas are at risk of closing their doors. The rising cost of health care combined with state budget constraints have made funding decisions critical to maintaining health care services.

Rep. McMorris worked with budget writers and health care providers to help protect health care services in rural areas. The budget approved by the Legislature will provide direct "Proshare" payments of \$9.6 million to rural hospitals, but it will be paid out over two years, rather than a single payment in the first year, as the hospitals had hoped for. We will continue to seek a better long-term solution during next year's supplemental budget negotiations.



Rep. McMorris was instrumental in securing funding needed to help rural hospitals keep their doors open.

Fixing health care statewide

Our rural health care providers are struggling under a besieged statewide health care system strangled by high legal and regulatory costs. Too many government mandates make health insurance costly and force more lower- and middle-income workers to go without coverage. Small-group reform is still needed to help employers offer affordable coverage to their employees.

The price of insurance that doctors and hospitals need to protect themselves

from multi-million dollar lawsuits is too high. Medical malpractice insurance reform would bring down the cost of insurance, keep physicians in practice, and reduce the overall cost of health care.

Lawmakers made a small step in the right direction with prescription drug legislation designed to save the state money when it purchases medications for people who rely on government-funded health coverage.

Limited accountability measures approved

One of the reasons citizens have lost faith in government is the regulatory excess of state agencies that adopt costly and onerous rules affecting families and businesses. These agency regulations are drafted and implemented by unelected bureaucrats, yet often have the force of law and have had a chilling effect on our economy.

We must rein in these state agencies and restore accountability to the rule-making process with a number of regulatory reforms. This session, we approved legislation requiring the governor to sign all significant new rules drafted by his administration before they could take effect. This would have provided a small degree of accountability by requiring the state's chief elected official to sign off on new rules, rather than adopting them under the veil of appointed state agency directors.

Unfortunately the governor vetoed this protective measure, shunning responsibility for the actions of his own administration.

Other measures restricting the rule-making authority of agencies and giving citizens more power to fight back against excessive regulation were also introduced, but died in House committees controlled by the Democrat majority. We remain committed to fighting for reforms that will ease the regulatory burden on Washington's citizens and improve job opportunities.

Local youth gain experience with the Legislature

Our thanks to the young people from our local communities who came to serve as Legislative pages in Olympia during the 2003 session. The page program is open to youngsters between the ages of 14 and 17. They must have a grade point average of C+ or better and obtain written permission from their school and parent.

As part of their duties, pages observe the Legislature in action and are responsible for delivering messages and documents to legislators in their offices, committee hearings and the House chamber during floor sessions. They attend Legislative Page School daily and also make time for their regular homework.

More information on the House Page Program can be found at the following website: <http://www.leg.wa.gov/house/hadm/pageprog.htm>.

Thanks again to the young people from the 7th District who served as pages this year.

7th District Pages:

- Zachary J. Schlegel, 14, lone, home-schooled.
- Joseph Klein, 16, Edwall, Christian Heritage School.
- Kelly James, 14, Colville, Onion Creek School.
- Maddy Winter, 15, Tonasket, Tonasket High School.
- Sarah Godlewski, 14, Spokane, Lewis and Clark High School.
- Robin Fairbairn, 15, Metaline Falls, Selkirk High School.
- Lynessa Booth, 15, Colville, home-schooled.
- Erin Ray, 15, Chewelah, Jenkins High School.
- Kimberly DeRusha, 14, Spokane, Northwest Christian School.

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